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ONE DAY THE RUSS-
ians started going
away. They had a new
machine that did the trick.
The C.I.A. knew they had a
machine that made things go
away, but it couldn't find out
where they went to.

Naturally, the United States funded thousands of science professors to develop our own going-away machine. It was called Exit. The President warned Congress there was a dangerous exit gap and unless the United States closed it fast, Russia would go away before we did.

Even as he spoke, Russia was going fast. In a matter of days, extraordinary emptiness sprang up on the Russian landscape. Red Square complete with Lenin's tomb, posters of Karl Marx, almost all of Siberia, the entire Bolshoi Ballet and the city of Leningrad went away during an afternoon.

That evening, an American television reporter doing a stand-up report on the exits was humiliated when the Kremlin, which he had been using for a scenic backdrop, went away while he was signing off with, "What will go away next, nobody knows."

Next day, the rest of Moscow went away, along with Kiev, Vladivostok, the steppes, the Volga, Pravda, caviar, the K.G.B., the entire Red Army, the 1812 Overture, the Russian winter, Count Vronsky, the annual wheat crop failure and a staggering volume of vodka.

Apparently the Russians intended to go away entirely and take Russia with them so they wouldn't get homesick.

Americans, delighted by the idea that the universe might be big enough to contain both of Earth's nervous superpowers, celebrated by kissing strangers in the streets and shouting, "The Russians are going, the Russians are going."

Americans who really knew the Russians did not celebrate, though. Famous econo-

mists and syndicated columnists outlined the demonic nature of Russia's plot to Americans too stupid to recognize the peril posed by life without a deadly enemy.

With Russia gone away, the great economic pump-priming engine created by the Pentagon to protect us from the Russians might be hard to justify.

Even while the Russians remained, there had been plenty of soreheads saying it was unjust to make a working stiff cough up two days' salary every week so the Pentagon's corporations could wallow in tax-free profits.

Now with the Russians going fast, these whiners might turn into an entire country roaring, "Will no one rid us of these Pentagon leeches, especially the ones that are always being indicted for defrauding the Government?"

The White House held an emergency meeting of the National Boondoggle Council the night the Associated Press reported that the place once known as Russia was entirely vacant of everything except a light mist coming off an underfoot surface that felt like map paper.

They said the President wept when Congressional leaders told him of mounting public sentiment for standing the Pentagon's biggest contractors up against the wall. It is possible he did, for the President loved all weapons and all corporations that made them. He must have known that without the Russians, the world he knew and loved was finished.

Less sentimental economists told him how bad things were. Their spokesman said, "If we can no longer pump trillions into these bumbling state-subsidized weapons companies, we will not only have heavy unemployment, collapse of the consumer-

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goods market and catastrophe galore, we will also have a lot of Congressmen on our backs because there will no longer be a trough of Pentagon gravy for them to get their snouts into."

The President spoke the words that lesser men feared to utter: "Without Russians to threaten us with doom, we face catastrophe?"

The economists said, precisely, Mr. President. Russians, they are terrible and we can't do without them. Couldn't the United States, for heaven's sake, persuade them to come back?

Impossible, said the Secretary of Defense. The Russians had surely gone away for the specific purpose of destroying the American economy. They would not come back until it lay in ruins.

The President, dynamic as always, declared that America would not take its enemy's exit lying down. His decision: pump trillions into our own Exit program. In the hands of the Pentagon's contractors, it might take decades, even centuries, of refreshing money-squandering to develop an effective Exit of our own.

"Then," he said, "we will all go away to wherever the Russians have gone to, and life, by George, can get back to normal." ■

